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DEPARTMENT OF VISITING NURSING AND SOCIAL WELFARE



IN CHARGE OF
HARRIET FULMER

FROM Richmond comes the news that the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association has given a nurse to the public schools of the city, and the City Council values the work to the extent of creating the office of school nurse for the John Marshall High School. The Board of Health has recently employed three nurses to devote their entire time to the prevention of infant mortality and one to assist in stamping out an epidemic of measles. The Board of Health has also paid the salary of two district nurses for the last two years in order to have better co-operation by the nurses in the tuberculosis work.

THE report of the work done by the visiting nurses of Chicago, as given by Miss Fulmer in her annual report, is of interest to others. We quote almost in full.

"The work has been characterized by a fine up-to-date spirit of unrest—unrest because of handicaps, that will not allow us to do for our great city all that our brains and hands are standing ready to do, and so we must, day after day, come back from our labor discouraged because of the things which we cannot accomplish. The people of Chicago send this group of women forth, as scouts in the warfare against disease, as an alleviating agency for those in bodily ills; but the public at large would also do well to listen to the story that year after year, day after day, those women are bringing back from the highways and byways of the living places of the masses. Come with us to 'the other side' and see why we are sounding the note of wholesome discontent.

"Come with us to the homes of little children crowded into dark, damp living-rooms, where poverty and immorality and deficiency go hand in hand; where filthy streets and garbage boxes wage victoriously over trained nurses and free ice and sterilized milk, in the fight against our baby death-rate. We need a man among us with the courage of his convictions, who shall not be satisfied because 'we are making

progress,' but one who shall find time to see that Chicago's disease-breeding tenements are abolished, that her streets and alleys, where the poor must live, shall be kept at least decent.

"This may not altogether do away with the need for aid societies, hospitals, probation officers, and visiting nurses, but it will go many steps toward lessening their ever-increasing demand. When Chicago does her municipal duty, it will need eight visiting nurses instead of 85. However, with our own specific discouraging view-point we are also not unmindful of all the fine activities that ameliorate some of the conditions which we find. Our playgrounds and our parks and our health offices we are grateful for.

"We are particularly fortunate in drawing to our work an unusually fine set of applicants. Our new rule of requiring every nurse to present her certificate of state registration, in addition to her diploma, has proved a good one, as such a declaration of standard helps to advance the place of the trained nurse everywhere.

"Aside from our tried and tested list of those waiting for openings, we have many hundreds in the year who apply and never come back, and some who do come knowing nothing of the life are amusing. One woman wished to do the work because she was consecrated to the Lord's service. She stayed two hours and departed, saying she did not know how any one could be 'expected to work in such heat and in such a filthy home as we sent her to,' when she could get plenty of private duty in Lake Forest. We commended her to the latter in all seriousness.

"Training schools for nurses ought to be great powers to do away with this attitude among nurses. There is too much of it. For, by strange comparison, this lowly home the same day had a visit from one of the leading children specialists, who looked upon it as a privilege to give his time and advice.

"The moment a visiting nurse crosses the threshold of the door all the occupants of that home become her responsibility. The physical condition of the house and the room is as important often as the patient in the bed. If she leaves that home with any stone unturned for helpfulness to better living, then she has missed her vocation. She has her opportunities thrust upon her every minute, and I wonder if the general public will ever realize what an equipment of heart, brains, and hand these women must carry with them to be successful. The requisites, compared to the work of the institutional or private nurse, are as 1 to 1000. One patient in one comfortable room, with a skilled physician on call, is quite a different proposition from a nurse with 75 patients in 75 different homes, miles apart, where poverty and igno-

rance and unsanitary conditions complicate the situation at every turn. Have you ever seen a visiting nurse bring order out of chaos in a few short hours? An early morning call brought us to a home where disease and poverty and despair were everywhere apparent. The young wife and four little ones were huddled about a kitchen stove, the unmistakable cough heard from a rear room told us where our patient was, the husband in the last stages of tuberculosis. The picture was the most hopeless one one could wish to see. Two things relieved the gloom, the winter sun coming in at the window and the fine, strong, intelligent young woman in nurse's dress taking in the situation at a glance. In less time than it takes to tell, our coats were off, the fire burning brightly, and the kitchen tidied. By this time the patient in the dark room beyond had been brought out and made as comfortable as possible on chairs beside the stove. All the time the nurse had been speaking words of cheer to the mother, who had been persuaded to wash and tidy her little ones, who were now happy at the window watching the passers-by. The father was urged to go to the hospital where he is comfortable, the house has been cleaned and disinfected, the children go to a day nursery, and the mother, who is an excellent laundress, goes daily to work.

"We have found that 'prevention' is the cheaper method of accomplishing our work and costs less than medicine and doctors. Warm clothing, nourishing food, milk and eggs, cost less than tonics. It is false reasoning to send a nurse and doctor to children who are ill from lack of clothing and nourishing food.

"Each of our 35 districts represents by itself not only a complete hospital ward, but has all the ramifications necessary to perfect social service to the families into which we are called. The nurse knows her police sergeant, her hospital, her day nursery, her probation officer, the ambulance service, the schools, the relief agencies. When she discovers a deficient child out of school, she knows what to do at once to secure for him some sort of instruction. She either sends him to a subnormal room, or sees that a visiting teacher comes to him.

"We went many steps forward when we formed an alliance on each side of the city with the three large medical schools. We now have our daily headquarters on the west side at Rush Medical College, on the south side at Northwestern Medical Dispensary, and on the north at the Polyclinic. This divides the city into the three nursing centres with a complete organization as if it were a separate and distinct association, with a supervising nurse in charge of each division. At each of these stations both the visiting and school nurses meet each

day between the hours of 12 and 1 o'clock to write their reports, replenish supplies, and communicate with the main office. This brings the entire field work under close supervision daily, and makes far better service to each patient. No social worker in Chicago comes into so close personal contact with the less fortunate as the district nurse, and the medical men at the clinics of these three colleges realize that the coming of the district nurse to their aid has been a valuable asset in accomplishing the otherwise inadequate clinic and dispensary service. Now that the nurses meet at the dispensaries each noon they bring back verbal reports to the physicians and in return receive instruction from them regarding the cases. No more intelligent alliance could be obtained than this. It has taken much patient waiting to accomplish this. Beside the value of the work to the patient and the nurse, we must not forget the newly awakened interest in the less fortunate and their surroundings which is coming to the medical man. Nine hundred physicians brought personal service to our patients last year and helped us to discover many solutions for the problems that overtake us.

"In revisiting many of the babies cared for during July and August, we found more than two-thirds of the mothers not only grateful but carrying out what the nurses had taught them. It simply demonstrated that with a steady pressure of advice and instruction throughout the year, we would be an immense factor in reducing infant mortality.

"The most satisfactory summer outings were the four large day outings to mothers and babies. Every mother invited had not been out all summer, many of them had never seen a park. The colored peoples' outing at Jackson Park was especially gratifying as none of the outing places take them. As Miss Smith said, if it hadn't been for the Visiting Nurse Association, what would the colored people have done?

"The most satisfactory and beneficent of all the summer work was the ice distribution. One thousand one hundred ice books were given us for distribution by the *Tribune*, each book representing one thousand pounds of ice. They were circulated among two thousand families. This gift prevented great suffering, and in the homes where babies were receiving milk, it was of untold value.

"The suffering during the hot months, among the bedridden tuberculosis cases, was especially pathetic, and the ice seemed a Godsend. The nurses found the tuberculosis cases the hardest problem. The windows and doors without screens allowed flies to come in, and added not only to the discomfort of the patient but the danger of contagion.

Five thousand yards of green netting was given out and this helped some.

"Seventeen vacation schools asked for a nurse. The nurses went three times a week to give instruction and inspection. Talks on cleanliness and personal hygiene received commendation from the superintendent. A large number of tooth-brushes were given out.

"We have had a fine co-operation from all the social settlements, the united charities, the county agent, the probation officers, the Juvenile League, and most especially from the day nurseries, where the nurses have made periodical visits throughout the year.

"It has been a great comfort and infinite satisfaction to have, throughout the year, for our cases, the privilege of advice from the best in the medical profession, to have access to the beds in every hospital in Chicago. On one day 125 beds, not counting the County Hospital, contained visiting nurse cases, all sent upon advice of physicians.

"It is extravagant and bad business policy to delay longer the erection of the Tuberculosis Sanatorium. The thousands of curable cases, while we deliberate, may be past helping, and the thousands of infectious cases may have infected a thousand non-infectious cases, all soon to become objects of charity or public charges. While we deliberate about the building of a city hospital for acute and contagious diseases, death is taking toll of many little ones.

"Our two nurses in the welfare department of the McCormick and Deering divisions of the International Harvester Co., have been openly commended for their work by the managers of both these places. More than 5000 girls have been cared for, physically, and the moral influence alone is worth far more than the expenditure.

"The work of social service nurse supplied by us to look up all cases at the Children's Memorial Hospital, in both the out-patient department and the cases admitted to the hospital, is of great value. Social service work to hospitals and dispensaries is not only the duty of the hospital, but is of financial benefit as well. In the very near future, every hospital will have its social service nurse, and the Visiting Nurse Association stands ready to provide the worker when that time comes. Before another summer we must have a special dispensary for babies, or better still, a Bureau of Child Hygiene, with the dispensary and milk station as a special department of the work.

"The emergency corps of seven nurses sent to 'the Cherry Mine disaster' have received unlimited praise from every one connected with the work. They started from Chicago at a moment's notice, with hospital supplies (the only thing of this nature on the grounds, at any

time). They sat up nights with women who aborted, they went from house to house, knowing personally every woman in the village. They stayed on duty at the mouth of the mine and rendered help to the rescuing parties. They furnished the gauze, face protectors, and stimulants to the men as they came up; they gave the only rubber gloves to the undertakers who were handling decomposing bodies, and above all they comforted the women as no one else could. Their familiar uniform will never be forgotten in that little village of woe, either by the working people or the mine officials.

"There will soon be a movement started to ask the Red Cross to form an alliance with the visiting nurse associations in this country, for nursing service in local disaster, just as they have with relief societies. No group of nurses stands so constantly equipped to render emergency service as these nurses. They are always on call, and for any local service nothing could be found more expeditious. It is a wise and feasible proposition and above all a duty of the local association.

"Almost any one would envy our school nurses their opportunities. The population of the schools they visit every week is 134,000 children. The service they render has corrected defective vision for hundreds, removed the adenoids of mouth-breathers in scores, attended to vermin heads by thousands, treated impetigo and common itch and skin diseases by as many more, and the nurse did not accomplish all this either in one or two visits, but dozens of them and after hours of weary pleading."

The importance of a wise, kind, but firm nurse cannot be overestimated, even at the very beginning. One who, instead of taking up the baby when he cries, turns him gently and patiently until he finally goes to sleep, is not merely conferring a blessing upon the parents by preventing night-shirt parades on their part, but is so influencing the child by teaching it peace and content with its surroundings, that it will grow up a happy, contented member of the household and society. If these lessons are not taught thus early, a nervous, excitable child is produced, the neurotic man or woman, one of the most deplorable conditions which we have to treat.—DR. SAMUEL D. GILBERT in *Yale Medical Journal*.